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Amendments to the Claims

A complete list of pending claims follows, with indicated amendments:

1. (Previously Amended) A vending machine, comprising:

a housing for storing products to be dispensed;

a product dispensing assembly comprising a dispenser for holding and dispensing products,

wherein the dispenser has an open side and is mounted substantially horizontally within the housing and rotatable about an axis,

wherein the dispenser uses a retractable gauge step adaptable to vend products of various sizes,

wherein the product dispensing assembly has a plurality of cutout slots and the retractable gauge step has a plurality of hooks, wherein the cutout slots and the hooks are coupled such that the gauge step and the dispensing assembly are substantially permanently affixed to each other;

a product chute for receiving products when dispensed by the dispenser; and

a motor coupled to the dispenser for rotating the dispenser.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Previously Amended) The vending machine according to claim 1, wherein the retractable gauge step adaptable to being in a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

4. (Original) The vending machine according to claim 3, wherein the retractable gauge step is adaptable to being in a second position where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

5. (Original) The vending machine according to claim 4, wherein the retractable gauge step is operable to slide from a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a second position

where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

6. (Original) The vending machine according to claim 5, wherein the retractable gauge step comprises a plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the first position.

7. (Original) The vending machine according to claim 6, wherein the retractable gauge step comprises a plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the second position.

8. (Cancelled)

9. (Previously Amended) The vending machine according to claim 7, wherein the retractable gauge step is further adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality of gauge steps to support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

10. (Original) The vending machine according to claim 9, wherein the retractable gauge step is further adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

11. (Original) The vending machine according to claim 10, wherein the retractable gauge step is operable to slide from a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality of gauge steps to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a plurality of positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

12. (Previously Amended) A method for dispensing products from a vending machine, comprising the steps of:

providing a vending machine comprising a product dispensing assembly, the product dispensing assembly using a retractable gauge step,

wherein the product dispensing assembly has a plurality of cutout slots and the retractable gauge step has a plurality of hooks, wherein the cutout slots and the hooks are coupled such that the gauge step and the dispensing assembly are substantially permanently affixed to each other;

storing products in the product dispensing assembly;

employing the retractable gauge step for supporting products stored in the product dispensing assembly wherin the dispensing assembly is rotatable about an axis and wherein the retractable gauge step is adaptable to dispense products of various sizes; and

dispensing products from the dispensing assembly in a sequential manner.

13. (Cancelled)

14. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 12, wherein the retractable gauge step adaptable to being in a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

15. (Original) The method according to claim 14, wherein the retractable gauge step is adaptable to being in a second position where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly.

16. (Original) The method according to claim 15, wherein the retractable gauge step is operable to slide from a first position where the gauge step is extended to create a gauge step to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a second position where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the product resting in the product dispensing asscmbly.

17. (Original) The method according to claim 16, wherein the retractable gauge step comprises a plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the first position.

18. (Original) The method according to claim 17, wherein the retractable gauge step comprises a plurality of detents operable to hold the gauge step in the second position.

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 18, wherein the retractable gauge step is further adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality of gauge steps to support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

21. (Original) The method according to claim 20, wherein the retractable gauge step is further adaptable to being in a plurality of positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.

22. (Original) The method according to claim 21, wherein the retractable gauge step is operable to slide from a plurality of positions where the gauge step is extended to create a plurality of gauge steps to support the product resting in the product dispensing assembly to a plurality of positions where the gauge step is retracted such that the gauge step does not support the products resting in the product dispensing assembly.